



## Former Northwestern Barrel Superfund Site Update on Field Activities

### South Milwaukee, Wisconsin

August 1997

This fact sheet will update you on activities at the former Northwestern Barrel site (Marina Cliffs) near Marina Drive and 5th Avenue in South Milwaukee.

#### Site Background

The 13-acre Marina Cliffs Barrel site (formally known as Northwestern Barrel) is located in South Milwaukee along Lake Michigan between Marina Drive and the South Milwaukee Wastewater Treatment plant. It is a former drum recycling facility which operated from 1941 to 1964. While in operation, different residual wastes from the drum cleaning operation were placed in disposal pits on the eastern portion of the property. The ravine on the north side of the property was also impacted during barrel-cleaning activities. In response to complaints from the public regarding the presence of drums, U.S. EPA and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) made three inspections from June 1985 to December 1987. Soil and surface water samples were taken; however, only low levels of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) were found. In 1990 and 1991, in anticipation of developing the property, current owner Towne Realty hired a contractor to remove contaminated soil and drum fragments from the site.

In late 1994, U.S. EPA did a site assessment which revealed the presence of metals, VOCs, and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). In 1995, U.S. EPA issued an order to numerous companies suspected of sending drums to the site and to Towne Realty as the owner of the site. The order required the removal of the contents in the on-site disposal pits and additional testing. Subsequent to this order, the group of companies complying with the order tested the on-site disposal pits. In late 1996, these companies excavated waste materials from the two disposal pits and stockpiled the

materials on a concrete staging pad built on the site. Treatment of this waste is addressed below.

#### Waste Treatment and Removal

The treatment of wastes that began in June continues. As you may know, this work involves treating waste materials that were removed from two former disposal pits at the end of Marina Drive beside the bluff. Inside a temporary structure, these wastes are being combined with Portland cement which will stabilize the contaminated material for transport and disposal in a local landfill.

As a result of unanticipated problems in preparing the waste material for treatment, the work is not occurring as quickly as anticipated. U.S. EPA anticipates this work to be completed by the end of August. When treatment is complete and treated wastes have all been removed, the temporary structure, trailers, and machinery will be dismantled and removed from the area.

#### Odors and Irritants

Residents living in the condos and apartments near the treatment area have complained of strong "paint solvent" chemical odors, and health symptoms such as sore throats, watery eyes, nausea and headaches. During treatment of wastes, odors have been released into the air as waste materials are stirred up and moved. The contaminants that are causing these odors and irritants are called Volatile Organic Compounds or VOCs. VOCs are a group of contaminants that evaporate easily into the air. These contaminants most likely came from the paints, thinners, solvents, degreasers, fuels and other materials that remained in the pits on the site after the barrel operation ended.

Throughout the treatment operation, U.S. EPA's

contractors and the company doing the treatment work have been monitoring air quality within the site and in the surrounding neighborhood. This monitoring is conducted to detect potentially harmful levels of dust and VOCs in order to protect both workers and nearby residents. **Levels of total VOCs (levels of individual VOCs added together) and individual VOCs detected at and around the treatment area are well within limits considered safe.** While strong odors and irritants are present and some residents may be experiencing discomfort as a result of these odors, the levels of VOCs present do not present a permanent or long term health problem.

The health standards in use are commonly accepted standards used by industry and government and exposure at or below the health standard is considered safe by even those workers who are exposed everyday all day over a working lifetime.

If you are experiencing discomfort, a couple of options to minimize your exposure during the next month include closing your windows or adjusting your air conditioner to recycle indoor air and spending time away from the areas where odors are present.

### **Fence Installation**

In addition to the fence surrounding the active treatment operation, a fence encompassing the rest of the site property has been installed. While U.S.EPA has been advised that some residents use this property to access the lake, walk dogs, etc., officials from U.S.EPA, WDNR, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and the Wisconsin Division of Health (WDOH) have determined that a fence is necessary to protect the public from the potential exposure to lead in the soils and physical hazards present at the site.

Because some of the condo and apartment buildings lie very close to the site's property boundaries, the fence has been installed at least 25 to 30 feet from the shared property line. The fence encompasses all areas of high lead contamination, areas of unknown but expected lead contamination, and physical hazards, and provides for a simple engineering design. Installation of the

fence is a temporary situation until contamination at the site has been addressed -- current estimates range as long as three years but the agencies involved will utilize every tool available to reduce that timeframe.

### **Public Information Meeting**

If you are interested in meeting with U.S.EPA and other agency representatives regarding upcoming sampling work or other site-related issues, please call Bri Bill, Community Involvement Coordinator, at the number below.

### **Concerns about Lead**

A number of residents have expressed concerns about possible lead in garden and other soils adjacent to condos and apartments.

WDOH has sampled surface (down to 4 inches) soils for lead. The lead levels found in the surface samples pose no health threat to residents. Analyses reveal that lead levels around the apartments and condominiums ranged from 17 to 121 parts per million (ppm). This is well below U.S.EPA's action levels for residential areas (500 ppm).

It is unknown whether deeper residential soils contain lead. When the treatment work at the disposal pits is complete, potentially responsible parties under U.S.EPA oversight will conduct further to assess what is at depth on both the site and residential areas. Despite rumors to the contrary, U.S.EPA has no intention to demolish any buildings if lead contamination is found at depth.

From a health standpoint, lead in deep soils is not a concern that demands immediate action. This is because of the way lead enters the body. Exposure to lead in soils occurs through two pathways - ingestion (eating) of lead contaminated soils and inhalation (breathing). Common outdoor activities such as gardening and playing in the grass do not typically result in long term contact with the deeper, potentially contaminated soils. Residents who are concerned about lead exposure and wish to be tested may contact their family doctor or the South Milwaukee Health Department

at the address below.

### **Future Cleanup Activities**

Once treatment work at the disposal pits is complete, potentially responsible parties under U.S.EPA oversight will conduct more extensive sampling and investigation of the site soils and surrounding residential areas to characterize site contamination. Among other things, investigations will reveal the horizontal extent of contaminated soil, the depth of contaminated soil, whether ground water has been contaminated, the types of contaminants, and location of "hot spots" When this investigation is complete, U.S.EPA, other State, Federal and local agencies and potentially responsible parties will evaluate alternatives for addressing any additional contamination that may be found.

Currently, potentially responsible parties are finalizing a work plan that outlines the sampling to be conducted. U.S.EPA, WDNR and WDOH will review the work plan before it is approved by U.S.EPA.

U.S.EPA and other agencies will continue to provide updates to the public and provide opportunities for public input. We encourage you to call these agencies with questions and concerns, and visit the site information repository located at the South Milwaukee Public Library's reference desk.

### **Information Repository**

Documents pertaining to the site are available for review at the library:

**South Milwaukee Public Library  
Reference Desk  
1907 Tenth Avenue  
South Milwaukee, WI 53172**

---

---

**For Additional Information**, please contact the following representatives:

Bri Bill  
Community Involvement Coordinator  
U.S. U.S.EPA (P-19J)  
77 West Jackson Blvd.  
Chicago, IL 60604  
(312) 353-6646  
E-mail: bill.briana@epamail.epa.gov

Bob Whippo  
Remedial Project Manager  
U.S.EPA (SR-6J)  
77 West Jackson Blvd.  
Chicago, IL 60604  
(312) 886-4759  
E-mail: whippo.robert@epamail.epa.gov

Andy Boettcher  
Project Manager  
WDNR  
4041 N. Richards St.  
Milwaukee, WI 53212  
(414) 229-0833

Dan Holcomb  
Public Health Educator  
Wisconsin Division of Health  
Dept.  
1414 East Washington Avenue  
Madison, WI 53703-3044  
(608) 267-2987

Clayton Koher  
Regional Representative  
ATSDR  
77 West Jackson Blvd.  
Chicago, IL 60604  
(312) 353-6086

Marcia Meilicke  
Public Health Adm.  
So.Milw. Health  
2424 15th Avenue  
So. Milw., WI 53172  
(414) 764-5060



United States Environmental Protection Agency  
77 West Jackson Blvd. (P-19J)  
Chicago, IL 60604

**First Class**

**Printed on Recycled Paper**